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**Sussex County
Government**

News Release

Sussex County Community Development & Housing director honored for work

Georgetown, Del., Sept. 30, 2011: William C. Lecates knows all too well how leaky roofs and crumbling walls can damage not just a home, but strain the foundation of family. The 61-year-old Georgetown native has been there himself growing up in a poor household.

That understanding eventually drew Mr. Lecates into a life a public service, and now his decades of work promoting quality, affordable housing and improving the standard of living among Sussex County's neediest families has won him top honors from his peers.

The Delaware Chapter of the National Association of Housing & Rehabilitation Officials recently awarded Mr. Lecates its 2011 Ambassador Award for his work in promoting affordable and fair housing in the state. Mr. Lecates was presented the award at the group's annual meeting at the Atlantic Sands in Rehoboth Beach in late September.

During Mr. Lecates' 21 years of leadership, the Community Development & Housing office has responded to meet the growing needs of low- and moderate-income families in Sussex County, from administering millions of dollars in housing rehabilitation projects to developing unique programs that encourage developers to build affordable houses for families who could not otherwise own or rent them.

"I'm honored by the Association's award and the respect of my colleagues," Mr. Lecates said. "But the biggest reward comes in the smiles and tears on the faces of people you've helped. I am proud of what we are doing here at Sussex County Community Development & Housing,

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and I believe this award validates not just my efforts, but the hard work of so many here who are dedicated to improving the lives of others.”

Association President Pam Ferguson said the group has awarded the honor each year since 1985 to someone in Delaware who has made a profound difference in the mission to ensure safe, affordable housing is available to all. “As director of Sussex County Community Development & Housing for more than two decades, he has recognized the need for affordable housing in the county, and has developed a reputation for meeting those needs,” Ms. Ferguson said.

Mr. Lecates, a graduate of Delaware State University who originally trained to become a teacher, has dedicated 32 years of his career in public service for the County, first as a coordinator of a summer youth program and eventually becoming director of the housing office. He has served in that role since 1990.

Sussex County’s Community Development & Housing office is responsible for preserving the county’s housing stock and promoting affordable housing for residents. The six-person office administers nearly a dozen federal, state and local programs, including the federal Community Development Block Grant program that helps pay for low-income housing projects, such as roof replacements, heating systems, window replacements and plumbing repairs.

In 1990, the program’s \$300,000 in federal funds helped approximately 25 families annually. Today, the County receives approximately \$1.3 million in CDBG and other federal funds, plus contributes \$50,000 in local money, all of which goes to help as many as 125 families each year. Still, more work is out there to be done, with as many as 1,000 names are on a years-long waiting list.

“You see first-hand how many people are suffering in this county day in and day out, and that need is always there. But every one we help, that’s a success,” Mr. Lecates said. “We do 125 or so rehab jobs each year, and that’s 125 more families each year who are living in better conditions than they were before we came in.”

Other initiatives that have been launched during Mr. Lecates’ tenure include:

- The Sussex County Moderately Priced Housing Unit program, in which developers can receive expedited review and increased density for including affordable housing in their projects;
- The Sussex County Rental Program, similar to the MPHU program but aimed at boosting the number of rental units;
- A program to partner with Habitat for Humanity to allow the use of vacant homes owned by the County near the Sussex County Airport as temporary housing for AmeriCorps volunteers and Habitat clients;
- The County's Neighborhood Stabilization Program, which uses federal funds through a locally developed program to lend zero-interest loans to low- and moderate-income home buyers to help cover down payments, closing costs, or pay for rehabilitation projects on their purchase. Another part of the program, which has become a model for programs elsewhere, works with partners, such as Habitat for Humanity, to lend money to buy and rehabilitate foreclosed homes, and then put those house keys into the hands of low-income buyers.

The success of those programs has been due in large part to Mr. Lecates' vision and passion for helping disadvantaged residents, said Brandy A. Bennett, the County's housing coordinator. Ms. Bennett nominated Mr. Lecates for this year's NAHRO award.

"Bill has really taken the office, the CDBG program and the County's overall efforts to the next level," Ms. Bennett said. "Bill has gone out of his way to get increased federal funding for Sussex County to help low- and moderate-income families, the people who need it the most."

"He's an inspiration to all of us in the housing community," Ms. Bennett said.

County Council President Michael H. Vincent congratulated Mr. Lecates on his award, and pointed to his office's work as an example of the positive and meaningful work local government can have on the lives of the people it serves.

"Bill's success is Sussex County's success, and we are proud of what he and his office have been able to accomplish over the years," Mr. Vincent said. "It is because of people like Bill Lecates that the American Dream can remain in reach for everyone, not just a privileged few."

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